



Ahimsā

Newsletter of the Charleston Buddhist Fellowship

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Buddhist Meditation

BY FRANCIS STORY
(1910—1972)

The mental exercise known as meditation is found in many religious systems. Prayer is a form of discursive meditation, and in Hinduism, the reciting of *ślokas* and *mantras* is employed to tranquilize the mind to a state of receptivity. In most of these systems, the goal is identified with the particular psychic results that ensue, sometimes very quickly; and the visions that come in the semi-trance state, or the sounds that are heard, are considered to be the end-result of the exercise. This is not the case in the forms of meditation practiced in Buddhism.

There is still comparatively little known about the mind, its functions and its powers, and it is difficult for most people to distinguish between self-hypnosis, the development of mediumistic states, and the real process of mental clarification and direct perception that is the object of Buddhist mental concentration. The fact that mystics of every religion have induced on themselves states wherein they see visions and hear voices that are in accordance with their own religious beliefs indicates that their meditation has resulted only in bringing to the surface of the mind and objectifying the concepts already embedded in the deepest strata of their subconscious minds. The Christian sees and converses with the saints of whom he already knows; the Hindu visualizes the gods of the Hindu pantheon, and so on. When the Bengali mystic Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa (1836—1886) began to turn his thoughts towards Christianity, he saw visions of Jesus in his meditations, in place of his former eidetic images of the Hindu Avatars.

The practiced hypnotic subject becomes more and more readily able to surrender himself to the

suggestions made to him by the hypnotizer, and anyone who has studied this subject is bound to see a connection between the mental state of compliance he has reached and the facility with which the mystic can induce whatever kind of experiences he wills himself to undergo. There is still another possibility latent in the practice of meditation; the development of mediumistic faculties by which the subject can actually see and hear beings on different planes of existence, the celestial planes (*devalokas*) and the realm of the unhappy ghosts (*petas*), for example. These worlds being nearest to our own are the more readily accessible, and this is the true explanation of the psychic phenomena of Western Spiritualism.

The object of Buddhist meditation, however, is none of these things. They arise as side-products. Not only are they not its goal, they are hindrances which have to be overcome. The Christian who has seen Jesus, or the Hindu who has conversed with Bhagavan Krishna may be quite satisfied that he has fulfilled the purpose of his religious life, but the Buddhist who sees a vision of the Buddha knows by that very fact that he has only succeeded in objectifying a concept in his own mind, for, after his *parinibbāna*, the Buddha is, in his own

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Activities

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship:

- Conducts informal seminars on Buddhism.
- Prepares and distributes free educational material.

Programs

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship sponsors the following programs:

- Instructions in meditation.
- *Dhamma* study groups.
- Retreats (at IMC-USA).

There are no fees for any of the activities or programs offered by the organization. Seminars are designed to present basic information about Buddhism to the general public — anyone may attend. However, study groups and meditation instructions are open to members only.

Retreats last ten days and are coordinated through IMC-USA in Westminster, MD (410-346-7889). Fees are set by IMC-USA. Advance registration is required.

One-on-one discussions about one's individual practice or about Buddhism in general are also available upon request. These discussions are accorded confidential treatment. There is no fee for one-on-one discussions. ■

Purpose of the Charleston Buddhist Fellowship

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship is an educational organization whose purpose is to preserve and promote the original teachings of the Buddha in the West.

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship actively encourages an ever-deepening process of commitment among Westerners to live a Buddhist way of life in accordance with the original Teachings of the Buddha.

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship provides free educational material to those who want to learn about Buddhism and about how to put the Teachings of the Buddha into practice.

The goals of the Charleston Buddhist Fellowship are:

1. To provide systematic instruction in the *Dhamma*, based primarily on Pāli sources.
2. To promote practice of the *Dhamma* in daily life.
3. To provide guidance on matters relating to the *Dhamma*, its study, and its practice.
4. To encourage the study of the Pāli language and literature.
5. To maintain close contact with individuals and groups interested in promoting and supporting the foregoing goals. ■

Dhamma Study Groups

The current Sunday morning meeting schedule is as follows:

- 9:00 AM: Basic/Introductory study group focusing on *The Essential Teachings of Buddhism*.
- 10:00 AM: Meditation sitting.
- 11:00 AM: Intermediate study group focusing on *Just Seeing* by Cynthia Thatcher.

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words, no longer visible to gods or men.

There is an essential difference, then, between Buddhist meditation and concentration and that practiced in other systems. The Buddhist embarking on a course of meditation does well to recognize this difference and to establish in his own conscious mind a clear idea of what it is he is trying to do.

The root-cause of rebirth and suffering is ignorance (*avijjā*) conjoined with and reacting upon craving (*taṇhā*). These two causes form a vicious circle; on the one hand, concepts, the result of ignorance, and on the other hand, desire arising from concepts. The world of phenomena has no meaning beyond the meaning given to it by our own interpretation.

When that interpretation is conditioned by *avijjā*, we are subject to the state known as *vipallāsa*, ‘distortion, hallucination, perversion’. *Saññā-vipallāsa*, ‘distortion of perception’; *citta-vipallāsa*, ‘distortion of consciousness’, and *ditṭhi-vipallāsa*, ‘distortion of views’, cause us to regard that which is impermanent (*anicca*) as permanent, that which is painful (*dukkha*) as a source of pleasure, and that which is unreal (*anattā*), or literally without any self existence, as being a real, self-existing entity. Consequently, we place a false interpretation on all the sensory experiences we gain through the six bases or sources (*āyatana*) of cognition, that is, the eye, ear, nose, tongue, sense of touch, and mind (*cakkhu, sota, ghāna, jivhā, kāya, and mano*). Physics, by showing that the realm of phenomena we know through these bases of cognition does not really correspond to the physical world known to science, has confirmed this Buddhist truth. We are deluded by our own senses. Pursuing what we imagine to be desirable, an object of pleasure, we are, in reality, only following a shadow, trying to grasp a mirage. It is impermanent (*anicca*), associated with suffering (*dukkha*), and insubstantial (*anattā*). Being so, it can only be the cause of impermanence, suffering, and insubstantiality, since like begets like; and we ourselves, who chase the illusion, are also impermanent, subject to suffering, and without any persistent ego-principle. It is a case of a shadow pursuing a shadow.

The purpose of Buddhist meditation, therefore, is to gain more than an intellectual understanding of this truth, to liberate ourselves from the delusion and thereby put an end to both ignorance and craving. If the meditation does not produce results tending to this consummation — results which are observable in the character and the whole attitude to life —, it is clear that there is something wrong either with the system or with the method of employing it. It is not enough to see lights, to have visions, or to experience ecstasy (*pīti*). These phenomena are too common to be impressive to the Buddhist who really understands the purpose of Buddhist meditation. There are actual dangers in them which are apparent to one who is also a student of psychopathology.

In the Buddha’s great discourse on the practice of mindfulness, the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, both the object and the means of attaining it are clearly set forth. Attentiveness to the movements of the body, to the ever-changing states of the mind, is to be cultivated in order that their real nature should be known. Instead of identifying these physical and mental phenomena with the false concept of “self”, we are to see them as they really are: movements of a physical body, an aggregate of the four elements (*mahābhūtas*), subject to physical laws of causality on the one hand, and on the other, a flux of successive phases of consciousness arising and passing away in response to external stimuli. They are to be viewed objectively, as though they were processes not associated with ourselves but belonging to another order of phenomena.

From what can selfishness and egotism proceed if not from the false concept of “self” (*sakkāyaditṭhi*)? If the practice of any form of meditation leaves selfishness or egotism unabated, it has not been successful. A tree is judged by its fruits and a man by his actions; there is no other criterion. Particularly is this true in Buddhist psychology, because the man *is* his actions. In the truest sense they, or the continuity of *kamma* and *vipāka* which they represent, are the only claim he can make to any persistent identity, not only through the different phases of this life but also from one life to another. Attentiveness with regard to body and mind serves to break down the illusion of self; and not only that, it also

cuts off craving and attachment to external objects, so that ultimately there is neither the “self” that craves nor any object of craving. It is a long and arduous discipline, and one that can only be undertaken in withdrawal from the world and its cares.

Yet even a temporary withdrawal, a temporary course of this discipline, can bear good results in that it establishes an attitude of mind which can be applied to some degree in the ordinary situations of life. Detachment, objectivity, is an invaluable aid to clear thinking; it enables a man to sum up a given situation without bias, personal or otherwise, and to act in that situation with courage and discretion. Another gift it bestows is that of concentration (*samādhi*) — the ability to focus the mind and keep it steadily fixed on a single point (*ekaggatā*, or ‘one-pointedness’), and this is the great secret of success in any undertaking. The mind is hard to tame; it roams here and there restlessly as the wind, or like an untamed horse, but when it is fully under control, it is the most powerful instrument in the whole universe. He who has mastered his own mind is indeed master of the Three Worlds (*tiloka*): (1) the world of desire (*kāmaloka*); (2) the world of form (*rūpa-loka*); and (3) the world of formlessness (*arūpa-loka*).

To begin with, he is without fear. Fear arises because we associate mind and body (*nāma-rūpa*) with “self”; consequently, any harm to either is considered to be harm done to oneself. But he who has broken down this illusion by realizing that the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*) are merely the manifestation of cause and effect, does not fear death or misfortune. He remains equable alike in success and failure, unaffected by praise or blame. The only thing he fears is demeritorious action, because he knows that no thing or person in the world can harm him except himself, and as his detachment increases, he becomes less and less liable to demeritorious deeds. Unwholesome action comes from an unwholesome mind, and as the mind becomes purified, healed of its disorders, bad *kamma* ceases to accumulate. He comes to have a dread of wrong action and to take greater and greater delight in those deeds that are rooted in *alobha*, *adosa*, and *amoha* — ‘generosity’, ‘benevolence’, and ‘wisdom’.

Mindfulness of Breathing (*Ānāpānasati*)

One of the most universally-applicable methods of cultivating mental concentration is *ānāpānasati*, attentiveness on the in-going and out-going breath. This, unlike the Yogic systems, does not call for any interference with the normal breathing, the breath being merely used as a point on which to fix the attention, at the tip of the nostrils. The attention must not wander, even to follow the breath, but must be kept rigidly on the selected spot. In the initial stages, it is permissible to mark the respiration by counting, but as soon as it is possible to keep the mind fixed without this artificial aid, it should be discontinued and only used when it is necessary to recall the attention.

As the state of mental quiescence (*samatha*) is approached, the breath appears to become fainter and fainter, until it is hardly discernible. It is at this stage that certain psychic phenomena appear, which may at first be disconcerting. A stage is reached when the actual bodily *dukkha*, the sensation of arising and passing away of the physical elements in the body, is felt. This is experienced as a disturbance, but it must be remembered that it is an agitation that is always present in the body, but we are unaware of it until the mind becomes stabilized. It is the first direct experience of the suffering (*dukkha*) which is inherent in all phenomena — the realization within oneself of the first of the Four Noble Truths, the truth of *dukkha*. When that is passed, there follows the sensation of *pīti*, rapturous joy associated with the physical body. The teacher of *vipassanā*, however, is careful never to describe to his pupil beforehand what he is likely to experience, for if he does so, there is a strong possibility that the power of suggestion will produce a false reaction, particularly in those cases where the pupil is very suggestible and greatly under the influence of the teacher.

Devices in Meditation

It is customary to use certain devices (*kasiṇas*) as objects of meditation (*kammaṭṭhāna*), such as the earth or color *kasiṇa*, as focal points for the attention. A candle flame, a hole in the wall, or some metal object can also be used, and the

method of using them is found in the Pāli texts and the *Visuddhimagga*. In the texts themselves, it is to be noted that the Buddha gave objects of meditation to disciples in accordance with their individual characteristics, and his unerring knowledge of the right technique for each came from his insight into their previous births. Similarly with recursive meditation, a subject would be given which was easily comprehensible to the pupil, or which served to counteract some strong, unwholesome tendency in his nature. Thus, to one attracted by sensual indulgence, the Buddha would recommend meditation on the impurity of the body, or the so-called “cemetery meditations”. The objective of these meditations is to counterbalance attraction by repulsion, but it is only a “skillful means” to reach the final state, in which attraction and repulsion both cease to exist. In the Arahant, there is neither liking nor disliking: he regards all things with perfect equanimity, as did Venerable Moggallāna when he accepted a handful of rice from a leper.

Mālā Beads

The use of the *mālā* ('string of beads') in Buddhism is often misunderstood. If it is used for the mechanical repetition of a set formula, the repeating of so many phrases as an act of piety, as in other religions, its value is negligible. When it is used as means of holding the attention and purifying the mind, however, it can be a great help. One of the best ways of employing it, because it calls for undivided attention, is to repeat the Pāli formula of the qualities of Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, beginning "*Iti'pi so Bhagavā ...*" — with the first bead, starting again with the second and continuing to the next quality: "*Iti'pi so Bhagavā, Arahaṁ ...*" — and so on until, with the last bead, the entire formula is repeated from beginning to end. This cannot be carried out successfully unless the mind is entirely concentrated on what is being done. At the same time, the recalling of the noble qualities of Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha lifts the mind to a lofty plane, since the words carry with them a meaning that impresses itself on the pattern of the thought-moments as they arise and pass away. The value of this in terms of *Abhidhamma*

psychology lies in the wholesome nature of the *cittakkhaṇa*, or ‘consciousness-moment’ in its *uppāda* ('arising'), *thiti* ('static'), and *bhaṅga* ('dissolution') phases. Each of these wholesome *cittakkhaṇa* contributes to the improvement of the *saṅkhāra*; or aggregate of mental formations; in other words, it directs the subsequent thought-moments into a higher realm and tends to establish the character on that level.

Samatha Bhāvanā

Samatha bhāvanā ('tranquility meditation' or 'calm abiding'), the development of mental tranquility with concentration (*samādhi*), gives three benefits: (1) happiness in the present life, (2) a favorable rebirth, and (3) the freedom from mental defilements (*kilesa*) that is a prerequisite for the attainment of insight. In *samatha*, the mind becomes like a still, clear pool, completely free from disturbance and agitation and ready to mirror on its surface the nature of things as they really are, the aspect of them which is hidden from ordinary knowledge by the restlessness of craving. It is the peace and fulfillment which is depicted on the features of the Buddha, investing his images with a significance that impresses even those who have no knowledge of what it means. Such an image of the Buddha can itself be a very suitable object of meditation, and is, in fact, the one that most Buddhists instinctively use. The very sight of the tranquil image can calm and pacify a mind distraught with worldly hopes and fears. It is the certain and visible assurance of *nibbāna*.

Vipassanā Bhāvanā

Vipassanā bhāvanā ('insight meditation') is the realization of the three characteristics (*tilakkhana*), of existence, *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*, through direct, penetrating insight (*vipassanā*). These three characteristics — impermanence, suffering and non-self — can be grasped intellectually, as scientific and philosophical truth, but this is not, in itself, sufficient to rid the mind of egoism and craving. The final objective lies on a higher level of awareness, the direct “intuitive” plane, where it is actually experienced as psychological fact. Until this personal confirmation is obtained, the

base of sense perception (*āyatana*) and sensory-responses remain stronger than the intellectual conviction; the two function side by side on different levels of consciousness, but it is usually the sphere dominated by ignorance (*avijjā*) that continues to determine the course of life by volitional (*cetanā*) action. The philosopher who fails to live according to his philosophy is the most familiar example of this incompatibility between theory and practice. When the direct perception is obtained, however, what was at its highest intellectual level still merely a theory becomes actual knowledge, in precisely the same way that we “know” when we are hot or cold, hungry or thirsty. The mind that has attained it is established in the Dhamma, and wisdom (*paññā*), has taken the place of delusion (*moha*).

Discursive meditation, such as that practiced in Christian devotion, is entirely on the mental level and can be undertaken by anyone at any time. It calls for no special preparation or conditions. For the more advanced exercises of *samatha* and *vipassanā*, however, the strictest observance of *sīla*, the basic moral rules (the precepts), becomes necessary. These techniques are best followed in seclusion, away from the impurities of worldly life and under the guidance of an accomplished master. Many people have done themselves psychic harm by embarking on them without due care in this respect. It is not advisable for anyone to experiment on his own; those who are unable to place themselves under a trustworthy teacher will do best to confine themselves to *samatha* meditation. It cannot take them to enlightenment, but it will benefit them morally and prepare them for the next stage.

The Practice of Mettā Bhāvanā

Loving-kindness meditation (*mettā bhāvanā*) is the most universally beneficial form of *samatha* meditation and can be practiced under any conditions. Thoughts of universal, unconditional loving-kindness, like radio waves reaching out in all directions, sublimate the creative energy of the mind. With steady persistence in *mettā bhāvanā*, a point can be reached at which it becomes impossible even to harbor a thought of ill-will. True peace can only come to the world through

minds that are at peace. If people everywhere in the world could be persuaded to devote half an hour daily to the practice of *mettā bhāvanā*, we would see more real advance towards world peace and security than international agreements will ever bring us. It would be a good thing if, in this new era of the *Buddhasāsana*, people of all creeds could be invited to take part in a world-wide movement for the practice of *mettā bhāvanā* and pledge themselves to live in accordance with the highest tenets of their own religion, whatever it may be. In so doing, they would be paying homage to the Supreme Buddha and to their own particular religious teachers as well, for on this level, all the great religions of the world can come together. If there is a common denominator to be found among them, it is surely here, in the teaching of universal loving-kindness, which transcends doctrinal differences and draws all beings together by the power of a timeless and all-embracing truth.

The classic formulation of *mettā* as an attitude of mind to be developed by meditation is found in the Karanīya Mettā Sutta (in the *Sutta Nipāta*). It is recommended that this *sutta* be recited before beginning meditation and again at its close — a practice which is customarily followed in the Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia. The verses of the *sutta* embody the highest concept to which the thought of loving-kindness can reach, and it serves both as a means of self-protection against unwholesome mental states and as a subject of contemplation (*kammathāna*).

It is taught in Buddhism that the cultivation of benevolence must begin with oneself. There is a profound psychological truth in this, for no one who hates or despises himself consciously or unconsciously can feel true loving-kindness for others. To each of us, the self is the nearest object; if one's attitude towards oneself is not a wholesome one, the spring of love is poisoned at its source. This does not mean that we should build up an idealized picture of ourselves as an object of admiration, but that, while being fully aware of our faults and deficiencies, we should not condemn but resolve to improve ourselves and cherish confidence in our ability to do so.

Mettā bhāvanā, therefore, begins with the thought: “May I be happy; may all my thoughts

be positive and all my experiences good. May I be free of problems, sickness, and sadness. May my lives be long and peaceful, and may I quickly reach enlightenment."

This thought having been developed, the next stage is to apply it in exactly the same form and to the same degree, first to one's mother, then to one's father, and then to someone for whom one has naturally a feeling of friendship.

In so doing, two points must be observed: the object should be a living person, and should not be one of the opposite sex. The second prohibition is to guard against the feeling of *mettā* turning into its "near enemy" — sensuality. Those whose sensual leanings have a different orientation must vary the rule to suit their own needs.

After the thought of *mettā* has been developed towards a friend, the next object should be someone towards whom one has no marked feelings of like or dislike. Lastly, the thought of *mettā* is to be turned towards someone who is hostile. It is here that difficulties may arise. They are to be expected, and the meditator must be prepared to meet and wrestle with them. To this end, several techniques are described in the *Visuddhimagga* and elsewhere. The first is to think of the hostile personality in terms of *anattā* — impersonality. The meditator is advised to analyze the hostile personality into its impersonal components — the body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. The body, to begin with, consists of purely material items: hair of the head, hair of the body, skin, nails, teeth and so on. There can be no basis for enmity against these. The feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness are all transitory phenomena, interdependent, conditioned, and bound up with suffering. They are *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*, impermanent, fraught with suffering, and void of selfhood. There is no more individual personality in them than there is in the physical body itself. So towards them, likewise, there can be no real ground for enmity.

If this approach should prove to be not altogether effective, there are other methods in which emotionally counteractive states of mind are brought into play, as, for example, regarding the hostile person with compassion. The meditator should reflect: "As he (or she) is, so am I. As I

am, so is he (or she). We are both bound to the inexorable Wheel of Life by ignorance and craving. Both of us are subject to the law of cause and effect, and whatever evil we do, for that we must suffer. Why then should I blame or call anyone my enemy? Rather should I purify my mind and wish that he (or she) may do the same, so that both of us may be freed from suffering."

If this thought is dwelt upon and fully comprehended, feelings of hostility will be cast out. When the thought of loving-kindness is exactly the same, in quality and degree, for all these objects — oneself, one's mother, one's father, one's friend, the person toward whom one is neutral, and the enemy — the meditation has been successful.

The final stage is to widen and extend the loving-kindness. This process is threefold: (1) suffusing *mettā* without limitation, (2) suffusing it with limitation, and (3) suffusing it in all of the ten directions — east, west, north, south, the intermediate points, above, and below.

In suffusing *mettā* without limitation (*anodhisopharana*), the meditator thinks of the objects of loving-kindness under five heads: (1) all sentient beings; (2) all things that have life; (3) all beings that have come into existence; (4) all that have personality; (5) all that have assumed individual being. For each of these groups separately, one formulates the thought: "May they be happy; may all their thoughts be positive and all their experiences good. May they be free of problems, sickness, and sadness. May their lives be long and peaceful, and may they quickly reach enlightenment." Then, for each object, one specifies the particular group which he is suffusing with *mettā*: "May all sentient beings be happy; may all their thoughts be positive and all their experiences good. May they be free of problems, sickness, and sadness. May their lives be long and peaceful, and may they quickly reach enlightenment"; etc. This meditation embraces all without particular reference to locality, and so is called "suffusing without limitation."

In suffusing *mettā* with limitation (*odhisopharana*), there are seven groups which form the objects of the meditation — they are: (1) all females; (2) all males; (3) all Noble Ones (those who have attained any one of the states of Saint-

hood); (4) all imperfect ones; (5) all celestial beings (*devas*); (6) all human beings; (7) all beings in states of woe. Each of the groups should be meditated upon as described above: “May all females be happy; may all their thoughts be positive and all their experiences good. May they be free of problems, sickness, and sadness. May their lives be long and peaceful, and may they quickly reach enlightenment”; etc. This method is called “suffusing *mettā* with limitation”, because it defines the groups according to their nature and condition.

Suffusing *mettā* to all beings in the ten directions is carried out in the same way. Directing one’s mind towards the east, the meditator concentrates on the thought: “May all beings in the east be happy; may all their thoughts be positive and all their experiences good. May they be free of problems, sickness, and sadness. May their lives be long and peaceful, and may they quickly reach enlightenment”; etc. And so with the beings in the west, the north, the south, the north-east, south-west, north-west, south-east, above, and below.

Lastly, each of the twelve groups belonging to the unlimited and limited suffusions of *mettā* can

be dealt with separately for each of the ten directions, using the appropriate formulas.

It is taught that each of these modes of practicing *mettā bhāvanā* is capable of being developed up to the stage of a *appanā-samādhi*, ‘access concentration’, that is, the concentration which leads to *jhāna*, or ‘mental absorption’. For this reason, it is described as the method for attaining release of the mind through *mettā* (*mettā cetovimutti*). *Mettā* is the first of the four *Brahma Vihāras*, the ‘sublime states’, concerning which the Karanīya Mettā Sutta states: *Brahmarūpā etam vihāram idha māhu* — “Here is declared the Highest Life.”

Mettā, karuṇā, muditā, and upekkhā (‘loving-kindness’, ‘compassion’, ‘sympathetic joy’, and ‘equanimity’) — these four states of mind represent the highest levels of mundane consciousness. Those who have attained to them and who dwell in them are impervious to the ills of life. They move and act in undisturbed serenity, armored against the blows of fate and the uncertainty of worldly conditions. And the first of these states to be cultivated is *mettā*, because it is through boundless love that the mind gains its first taste of liberation (*vimokkha*). ■

Pāli Language and Literature

**BY THOMAS WILLIAM RHYS DAVIDS
(1843—1922)**

The Pāli Language

“Pāli” is the name given to the language in which the oldest Buddhist scriptures are written. The word *pāli* means “text”, as distinguished from “commentary” and is traditionally used as the name for Māgadhī, the dialect of Magadha, which was, no doubt, the actual dialect spoken by the Buddha. Most modern scholars think that Pāli was a western Prakrit dialect, slightly different from Māgadhī. In any case, Pāli is but one of the Prakrit, or Middle Indo-Aryan, dialects which had developed in northern India between 1000—600 BCE from Sanskrit. Pāli is the only one of those

spoken dialects for which we have full and such early records, and it bears about the same relationship to Classical Sanskrit that modern Italian does to Latin.

We have records of other Prakrit dialects from about the sixth century CE, and the Jain Prakrit, in which the sacred books of the Jains were composed still later, is closely related to it. But the inscriptions of Asoka, the famous King of Magadha, in the middle of the third century BCE, come the closest to Pāli of all the existing linguistic documents of ancient India.

Down to the fifth century CE, the texts were handed down in Sri Lanka in Pāli and the commentaries in Sinhalese, the spoken language of Sri Lanka. During that century, the commentaries were retranslated into Pāli and now exist only in that language. The Pāli of these early commentators differs from that of the canonical texts in the same way that the Latin of Augustine differs from the Latin of Vergil and Cicero.

From the twelfth century CE onward, there have been a number of works composed from time to time in Śri Lanka, Myanmar (Burma), and Thailand in a form of Pāli which differs from the two previous stages in much the same way as the Latin of the medieval theologians and chroniclers differs from the Latin of Augustine and of Cicero. In this third and last stage of Pāli, a large number of words are introduced which are merely retranslations of Sanskrit, Burmese, Sinhalese, or Thai expressions, and the idiomatic phraseology of the sentences is often a reproduction of the idiom in which the authors were accustomed to speak in everyday life.

Of these three stages, the pure Pāli, or language of the canonical texts, though considerably older in time than the majority of books written in Classical Sanskrit, is considerably younger in form. The changes shown in it as compared with Sanskrit may be likened to the changes which have produced the modern Romance languages out of Latin and may be summarized as follows:

1. Every word has to end either in a vowel or in a vowel followed by nasalization (written *m̄* and pronounced like the *ng* in English *sing*).
2. The clusters of consonants which are so characteristic of Sanskrit are softened down by assimilation, elision, or contraction, or are avoided by the insertion of vowels.
3. The sound *r* has completely disappeared, the diphthongs *ai* and *au* are replaced by the vowels *e* and *o*, and the three *s*-sounds (*ś*, *ṣ*, and *s*) are all represented by simple *s*.
4. The rules of *sandhi*, that is, the combining of adjacent sounds, are greatly simplified, so that the words retain very much of their original form, and *sandhi* becomes in Pāli little more than a set of rules for the elision of vowels in a simple, natural way.
5. The rules of declension of nouns and the conjugation of verbs are much simplified, not only by the actions of the preceding principles, but also by the loss of the dual number and by other similar alterations.

Due to these factors, Pāli, like Italian, has become a language at once flowing, melodious, and sonorous, and an examination of its grammar and vocabulary reveals all the distinctive

characteristics of a vigorous, spoken, and growing vernacular, as opposed to the formality and stiffness of a dead language. There are, as in Sanskrit, a few imported words, such as *chāti* and *chumbāta*, borrowed from Dravidian or other sources. These few exceptions notwithstanding, the whole of the word-forms in Pāli are derived directly, like Classical Sanskrit, from the older language that was spoken by the Indo-Aryan conquerors of India. In about a score of instances, Pāli has preserved word-forms peculiar to the older language and lost in Classical Sanskrit, and it has preserved the Vedic *l*. In a few cases, it even has distinct traces of the still older language of which Sanskrit and the other Indo-Aryan languages are descendants.

About two-fifths of the words in Pāli are identical with their Sanskrit equivalents. There is another class, also comprising about two-fifths of the Pāli vocabulary, in which the change is so slight as to be easily recognizable. Thus, Sanskrit *mukta* ‘free’ becomes Pāli *mutta*; *klesa* ‘mental defilement’ becomes *kilesa*; *karma* ‘volitional action’ becomes *kamma*; *ambā* ‘mother’ becomes *ammā*; *agni* ‘fire’ becomes *aggi*; etc. Finally, there is a third class, which looms largest in the works on Pāli philology, but is really quite small in comparison with the other two classes, which contains those words in which the change is not so evident, such as Sanskrit *mleccha* ‘foreigner’ versus Pāli *milakkha*; *jyautsna* ‘clear’ versus *dosina*; *upādikā* ‘ant’ versus *upacikā*; *yantragrha* ‘bathroom’ versus *jantaggha*; etc.

Pāli Literature

Pāli literature consists of the sacred texts of Theravādin Buddhism, as well as other works by Buddhist authors, including histories, poetry, legends, commentaries, books on ethics, and controversial volumes on the rules of the Buddhist monastic order. Its volume is constantly being increased, for the Pāli language has become the *lingua franca* of the Buddhists of Southeast Asia and is still used by authors who wish to be read not only in their native country but by Buddhists in other countries in which Theravādin Buddhism prevails.

The Pāli books containing the sacred texts are divided into three collections called the *piṭakas*, or ‘baskets’.

The first division contains the disciplinary rules for Buddhist Monks and Nuns. This division is known as the *Vinaya Piṭaka*.

The second division is the most important for the proper understanding of the ethical and doctrinal teachings of the Buddha Himself and of the early Buddhists. This division contains a collection of discourses in which, usually the Buddha Himself, but occasionally also one of His chief disciples, sets forth some fundamental point of His teachings. These discourses are arranged in five collections, known collectively as the *Sutta Piṭaka*. They occupy in the history of Indian thought a position similar to that occupied in the history of Greek thought by the *Dialogues* of Plato. Compared to the works of Plato, the thought is more original, especially as being free from the ancient soul-theory. They are also much more systematized and worked out. The first two collections — the Long Discourses (*Dīgha Nikāya*) and the Middle-Length Discourses (*Majjhima Nikāya*) — were evidently put together at the same time, probably in the fifth century BCE, and by the same hands, and are, in reality, one book.

In the first two collections of discourses, the essential points of doctrine are all discussed, but each discourse deals, for the most part, with some particular point only, and related points typically occur in other discourses widely separated in the collection. This means that the various discourses have to be pieced together before one can arrive at a full understanding of the doctrine. The task of bringing together these discourses was already undertaken in a rather loose manner by the early Buddhists. First, they prepared a collection called the “Collected Discourses” (*Samyutta Nikāya*), in which the various utterances ascribed to the

Buddha were grouped according to particular subjects or particular persons being addressed. Next, there is a collection called the “Numerical Discourses” (*Ānguttara Nikāya*), in which the sayings are arranged in groups consisting of one, two, three, four, and so on up to twenty or thirty particular details.

The last collection (the *Khuddaka Nikāya*) consists of a number of shorter works of various dates and various contents.

All of the discourses in the *Sutta Piṭaka* deal, in one way or another, with ethical and intellectual training. This was necessarily based on a highly sophisticated view of psychology, one of the most interesting and important contributions of Buddhism to human thought, which is constantly referred to and frequently discussed in scattered passages in these discourses. These passages were collected and systematized in a series of works which form the third and last of the three great divisions of the *piṭakas*, the division called the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, the “Higher Teachings”. The *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* includes the following seven books: (1) *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*; (2) *Vibhanga*; (3) *Dhātukathā*; (4) *Puggalapaññati*; (5) *Kathāvathu*; (6) *Yamaka*; and (7) *Paṭṭhāna*.

In addition to these texts, there is a huge amount of commentarial and sub-commentarial literature as well as many non-canonical works, including anthologies, cosmological texts, poetry, stories, chronicles, and letters and inscriptions composed in Pāli. Among these are famous works such as the *Dīpavaṁsa* (*Chronicle of the Island* [of Sri Lanka]), the *Mahāvaṁsa* (*Great Chronicle* [also of Sri Lanka]), the *Abhidhammattha Sangaha* (*A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*), the *Visuddhimagga* (*The Path of Purification*), the *Milindapañha* (*Milinda’s Questions*), etc. ■